

Privilege—Mr. Crosbie

The north side of Argentina naval base, which is a base leased to the Americans for 99 years, was abandoned by them some two or three years ago. They imposed the condition that if the base were used by other persons or concerns for business or industrial development they had the right to get the facilities back on 30 days' notice. The minister has negotiated with the United States to have that changed, and I asked the minister whether he had discussions with U.S. authorities and, if so, when those discussions would conclude, and would there be an announcement of some change, or was there likely to be a change, to which the minister replied that he had discussions three weeks earlier and he was encouraged by the results and expected to get some word soon from the United States authorities. He also said:

However, I have no idea as to the specific date or time when I will hear from them.

Yesterday I discovered that United States authorities had informed the Government of Canada on or before October 21 that they were prepared to change this 30-day right so that they would only have the right to go back into the north side of the base in the event of a war, an emergency or a military necessity; that they had informed external affairs, the minister's department that the government of Newfoundland had been informed to the same effect, and that the Department of Regional Economic Expansion had been informed by the Department of External Affairs, for which the minister reports, to exactly the same effect.

I am not saying that the minister deliberately misled the House, and he may have a reasonable explanation, but certainly I was misled and the House of Commons was misled, and the people of Argentina and Newfoundland were misled by the minister's answer.

My question of privilege is that while the minister does not have to answer a question, when he is alleging to be giving the facts the facts surely have to be truthful and accurate, and not misleading or inaccurate.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that the minister's department had heard from the U.S. Embassy that this condition had been changed, how could the minister say in this House that he expects he will have some idea when he will hear from them at a date or time in the future, and he had not yet heard from them? This at least calls for an explanation from the hon. minister, Mr. Speaker, because I submit that to mislead the House of Commons knowingly or unknowingly is a breach of the privilege of members of this House.

I have a motion I could move, but there might be a better procedure. I am not sure of the procedure or if the minister wants to explain. Otherwise I will definitely have to move the motion because his answer and the facts just do not coincide.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Donald C. Jamieson (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I would like to explain the procedure to the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie).

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Crosbie.]

Mr. Jamieson: I was about to say to him that if I am around here long enough I suppose I will see everything, but this is the first time in my ten years here that I have been accused of misleading this House either deliberately or unintentionally.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jamieson: Secondly, Mr. Speaker, when this comes from the hon. member for St. John's West, a fellow Newfoundland, it is doubly revolting for me to have to deal with it in this way.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jamieson: The procedure, and surely to goodness the hon. member should know even though he is only a new member of this House, is, as most hon. members of this House have done on dozens of occasions in the past, to say to me, "Look, I have this information," and ask me for something additional, without raising it on a question of privilege in order to try to get some kind of cheap publicity out of it.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Jamieson: Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the situation can be quite readily explained. I think the hon. member should also have said that on the afternoon he asked that question he also came over to me and said he had not been able to ask a supplementary, and he sat in this chair alongside me and I gave him further information and told him I would get as much more as I possibly could as soon as I could.

Some hon. Members: Shame, shame!

Mr. Jamieson: The situation happens to be, Mr. Speaker, that the document to which the hon. member refers was indeed delivered, as he has said, to the Government of Canada sometime around the date he has mentioned. If he will look at my schedule for that time he will find I was in the Soviet Union at that particular time. I was not in a position to be briefed or informed by my colleagues or those in the department on what the note had contained. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member as a former cabinet minister in Newfoundland might have been screaming his head off in the other way if I had revealed publicly what was in the document before we got a response from the government of Newfoundland which we had undertaken to consult.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jamieson: Mr. Speaker, I was doing my best to look after the interests of Newfoundland long before the hon. member decided that he was going to lead us into a new era, and I continue to do so.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. As may have been evident in the remarks of the hon. member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), it did appear there was every likelihood of some disagreement between the two hon. members. That now